

THE OUTSTANDING P-40 'KITTYHAWK' FIGHTER PILOT'S 'EL ALAMEIN' 1942 D.F.C. GROUP AWARDED TO MAJOR 'WILDY' WILDSMITH OFFICER COMMANDING No. 2 'FLYING CHEETAHS' SQUADRON SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE WHO WAS OFFICIALLY CREDITED WITH 4 VICTORIES, 1 PROBABLE & 1 DAMAGED OVER THE WESTERN DESERT BETWEEN JULY & NOVEMBER 1942. HAVING PREVIOUSLY FLOWN HAWKER HARTS & MOWHAWKS IN THE EAST AFRICA & ABYSSINIAN CAMPAIGNS, HE WENT ON TO COMMAND 9 & 3 SPITFIRE SQUADRON'S IN SYRIA & ITALY DURING 1944



D.F.C. DATED 1942 AND PRIVATELY ENGRAVED 'H.E.N. ST. LEGER WILDSMITH' 'EL ALAMEIN.', 1939/45 STAR, AFRICA STAR WITH NORTH AFRICA 1942-43 CLASP, ITALY STAR, 1939/45 WAR MEDAL AND SOUTH AFRICA SERVICE MEDAL All Medals officially South African impressed '47886 H.E.N. WILDSMITH'. Mounted as originally worn, pin missing to rear of mount. With corresponding set of miniatures, also missing rear pin mount and set of S.A.A.F. Pilot Wings which have traces of being removed from a uniform.

D.F.C. *London Gazette* 4 December 1942:

"Captain Hugh Errol Noel Wildsmith (P. 47885), South African Air Force, No. 2 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron. This officer has participated in a large number of Sorties, including numerous fighter escorts and sweeps. On one occasion in July 1942, during an escort flight, his squadron engaged a formation of enemy bombers and destroyed 4 of them. Throughout the

engagement, Captain Wildsmith displayed great courage and initiative. In October 1942, his squadron was detailed to escort a bomber force well into enemy territory. Whilst over the target area, Captain Wildsmith became separated from the formation and his aircraft was attacked by 10 enemy fighters. Displaying great skill, he destroyed one of the attackers and frustrated the efforts of the others until he was able to re-join his formation. This officer has invariably displayed outstanding leadership and high courage. He has destroyed at least 3 enemy aircraft."



Hugh Errol Noel 'Wildy' Wildsmith was born on 23 November 1916 in Cape Town and enlisted for service in the South African Air Force on 9 December 1939. Selected for pilot training, he was Commissioned T/2nd Lieutenant Flying Officer on 2 April 1940 and served as an Instructor, being promoted T/Lieutenant on 2 December 1940. Posted to 4 Squadron S.A.A.F. (Hawker Fury's) in Kenya on 28 April 1941, he served with this Squadron until 30 June 1941, being posted to 41 Squadron S.A.A.F. (P-36 Mohawk's) in Abyssinia just over two weeks later. Soon after switching to 3 Squadron S.A.A.F. (P-36 Mohawk's), he was posted back to South Africa on 22 December 1941. Promoted T/Captain on 19 February 1942, on 13 April, Wildsmith departed for service in the Western Desert and was initially posted to S.A.A.F. Base Depot and trained on Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk's, where he was assessed as an above average fighter pilot. On 3 June 1942, he was posted to 2 Squadron S.A.A.F. (The flying Cheetahs) who had recently been reequipped with Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk's.

SERVICE WITH THE FLYING CHEETAHS

Wildsmith's first sortie with 2 Squadron was on 12 June 1942 and he notes in his logbook that he was attacked by two ME109's. Three days later during a sortie in which he was providing top cover for Boston's, he notes he was attacked by two Macchi's and 'did not know what was going on'. Between then and finally leaving 2 Squadron on 1 March 1943, Wildsmith would become a highly skilled fighter pilot and Flight Leader, being promoted to Major on 13 November 1942 and to command of the Squadron on 21 November 1942. He would complete a total of 106 operational sorties with 2 Squadron in North Africa and was credited with 4 confirmed aerial victories, 1 probable victory and 1 damaged. He was also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross:

Wildsmith's sorties:

June 1942 - 16

July 1942 - 25

August 1942 - 10

September 1942 - 7

October 1942 - 21

November 1942 - 20

December 1942 - 5

January - February 1943 mainly squadron training - 2 operations



In the Western Desert, 2 Squadron mainly operated as close air support and from October 1942 as fighter bomber squadron, bombing and strafing enemy targets and troops during the battle of El Alamein. However they also operated in a variety of other rolls and were credited with 26 aircraft destroyed, 6 possibly and 12 damaged during October and November 1942 alone. 2 Squadron's Motto was "*Semper in Excretum*" (Always in the Shit). Wildsmith has added this motto to the front cover of his logbook

AERIAL VICTORIES

Wildsmith 2 squadron S.A.A.F. aerial victory combat reports and combat damage to his aircraft follow. The latter taken from his logbooks and confirmed in 'A History of the Mediterranean Air War' Volume two:

2 July 1942 -Kittyhawk AK. 970 'C' - Damaged CAT 1: "*Jumped by two ME 109F's received three hits by cannon shells,. Shaken*"

5 July 1942 -Kittyhawk AK. 970 'C' - Damaged Slight

1 DAMAGED: 8 July 1942 –Kittyhawk AL.181 ‘W’ – BF109 damaged: “Two ME109’s broke through ** one and saw bits fly off. Great thrill”

VICTORY 1: 11th July 1942 –Kittyhawk AL.300 ‘P’ – ME109E – Destroyed

“Whilst diving on STUKAS I noticed two ME.109’s on my tail which necessitated my taking evasive action. I did a steep turn towards them and climbed into the sun. The two 109’s then attacked two other a/c and one of them pulled up straight at me. I gave him a long burst head on and glycol steamed out. He went into a steep dive but pulled out and belly landed finishing up on his nose.”

PROBABLE VICTORY : 1 September 1942 –Kittyhawk E.T.900 ‘T’ – Macchi 202 – Probable – El Alamein area

“I was leading the close escort to bombers when we were attacked from 6 o’clock by 3 109’s and 1 202. I turned my section about to meet them head-on. They immediately turned about left and I made a ¼ stern attack on the MC. Very large bits flew off him and he was seen by my no. 2 to fall slowly onto his back and head straight for the ground. I did not observe him go in as I had to rejoin the bombers.”

7 October 1942 – Kittyhawk ‘U’ – “Canopy blown off by flak in dive”

VICTORY 2: 20th October 1942 – Kittyhawk E.V 348 ‘U’ - Macchi 202 – Destroyed in flames - Fuka

“On approaching L.G.17 the Squadron was attacked by 2 ME109F’s. When this attack was finished I found that I was myself about 5 miles from FUKA aerodrome. I was then engaged by 5 MC202’s and 4 ME 109F’s. The 202’s made a line astern attack on me and I turned and did a head-on on the leader. I gave him a long burst and his port mainplane buckled and the z/c burst into flames. The 202’s then made off but the 109’s made repeated attacks on me over the drome for about 3 minutes. I eventually managed to evade them and I rejoined the bombers about 10 miles SE of FUKA.”



VICTORY 3: 20th October 1942– Kittyhawk E.V 348 ‘U’ – ME109f – Destroyed

“On our return from L.G.104 I observed 2 ME109F’s on my port side about 400 yards away. They were doing a gentle climbing turn to the left. I turned and got onto the tail of the nearest machine and gave him a long burst, I observed do wilde bursting on the back of his cockpit

and he did a gentle stall turn and went straight down. I had only one gun left so did not follow him. Capt Parsonson however followed him down to 3,000' and said that he was smoking so badly that he must have been on fire. He did not see him go in as his attention was diverted by other enemy aircraft."

Consolidated Squadron Sortie Report for above confirming victory:

"During dive to bomb LG104 at 8000', we saw a/c taking off, following instructions we dropped our bombs on the nearest target, a big supply depot at 83231s. We were then attacked by 4 ME109F's in pairs line astern from about 9000'. Fighting took place out at sea until the 88 Easting, during which Lt, P. D. Bryant destroyed an ME109F, his no.2 saw it go into the sea. Capt. Wildsmith also destroyed at ME109F but only claimed a probable as nobody saw it do in, this was later confirmed destroyed."

VICTORY 4: 11th November 1942– Kittyhawk E.V 348 'U' – JU87 – Destroyed – SW of Sollum

"While on recce of GAMBUT area 15 Stukas with an escort of 200's were sighted. They were eventually engaged at 8000' about 10 miles SW of SOLLUM. They dived for the ground and I fired several bursts into one of them. I pulled up over him and saw him smoking and he went for quite a distance but as I prepared to attack again he landed and heeled over on to his mainplane."

During the above sortie, 2 Squadron brought down no less than 8 of the 15 Stuka's destroyed and 4 probably. The consolidated sortie report:

"The story of the operation is essentially one of brilliant leadership and anticipation on the part of Capt. Wildsmith who was leading 2 Squadron. The Squadron took off at dawn on a reconnaissance but shortly after setting course 15 Stukas were seen with an escort of 109's. Capt Wildsmith led his Squadron away from the Stukas anticipating their return when the coast was clear. Two of our pilots were shot down by 109's but are now safe with the Squadron. True to form the Stukas came back when they thought we had gone on our way and Capt Wildsmith came in from astern, the 109 escort by now having gone on its way. The result was a massacre, 8 Stukas were destroyed and 4 more were probably destroyed. The American's caught the remaining three as they went in to land at Gambut!"

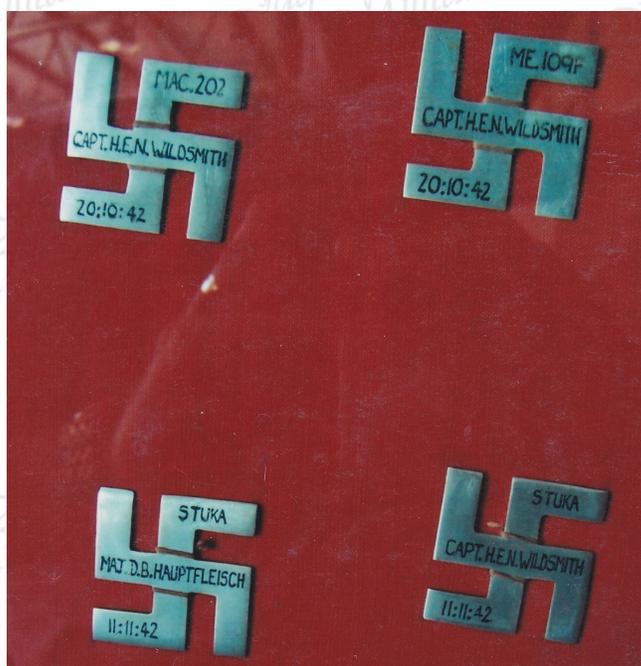


MAJOR WILDSMITH DESCRIBING AN MANOEUVRE

Each confirmed aerial victory by pilots of 2 Squadron in North Africa was commemorated on a small metal swastika device, with the name of pilot date and enemy aircraft engraved onto it. They were then pinned to the famous 2 Squadron aerial victories flag ; which was basically a captured German flag. Examples of the engraving would be; 'MAC.202 CAPT. H.E.N. WILDSMITH 20:10:42' 'ME. 109F CAPT. H.E.N. WILDSMITH 20:10:42' and so on. (pictures of this with research).



MAJOR WILDSMITH AT CENTRE HOLDING THE SQUADRON'S MASCOT; A MONKEY



SERVICE POST 2 SQUADRON

Major Wildsmith returned to South Africa on 19 March 1943 and was posted as Officer Commanding 10 Squadron S.A.A.F. at Durban on 28 April 1943. This Squadron was renamed 'B' Flight, 11 O.T.U. in July that year. In April 1944 he embarked for the Middle East and in May was posted as Officer Commanding of the newly formed 9 Squadron S.A.A.F. in Syria. Flying Spitfire MK.VC's., the squadron was initially tasked to provide air protection of the Suez Canal and the coastline of the Nile Delta, before transferring to Libya in September. On 22 November 1944, Wildsmith was transferred Officer Commanding 3 Squadron S.A.A.F. in Italy. Equipped with Spitfire MK. IX's, he remained with this Squadron for just over a month before a series of non operational S.A.A.F. postings for the duration of the War. Wildsmith appears to have finally returned to service in South Africa, before finally being released from service on in August 1946

Service records list operational service with 9, 2, 41 and 3 Squadrons S.A.A.F. and the East Africa, Abyssinian, Western Desert and Italian Campaigns. His medal entitlement is confirmed



Note: The medals come with a photocopy of Major Wildsmith's original no.2 log book, the original of which is held in the South African Air Force Museum at Swartkorps in Pretoria. The log book includes a large amount of most interesting and useful entries. However it has various 'added' entries and notes which increase his victory tally to 9 aircraft destroyed, 4 probably destroyed and 1 damaged. These 'added' entries are clearly in a different hand and have clearly been added to increase the desirability of this already outstanding group. The original logbook held in Pretoria has not been checked but is assumed the logbook was photocopied, the new entries added and the photocopied logbook photocopied again to appear like these entries were as added by Wildsmith. Luckily whoever added the entries has handwriting nothing like Wildsmith's!. Wildsmith is correctly and officially recorded with 4 confirmed victories, 1 probably destroyed and 1 damaged, the entry for each of these confirmed in his logbook and also in Squadron and Official records which also come with the group.



Condition generally VF or better. Medals and Wings come with a substantial amount of copy research, including a photocopy of Wildsmith's pilot no 2 logbook, which details flights from April 1942 until November 1944. Also his full Service File with other papers. Additionally the following digital files (can be emailed or added to CD). This includes 2 Squadron S.A.A.F. War Diary 1942-3, 7 Wing War Diary 1942-3, M.C. LG, Wildsmith's Combat Reports and a large selection of photos of 2 Squadron's pilots, Kittyhawks and Wildsmith in North Africa

A quite outstanding South African fighter pilot's D.F.C. group